

LIFE'S CLASSROOM

LESSONS FROM THE PARABLES

UNIT GOALS

During this unit each child will—

-  learn Jesus' parables are relevant for today
-  learn to obey His teachings in their daily lives

UNIT KEY VERSE

Let us learn together what is good. Job 34:4

A school setting is used for this study because the parables are stories Jesus told to teach us lessons about living for Him. As you prepare to teach these lessons, be ready to learn so you can pass that knowledge on to the children in your group. You will want to be an example of one who hears and obeys God's Word.

The spiritual concepts of the parables, such as accepting Jesus, being thankful, being content, obeying the Word, living among sinners, making eternal choices, seeking forgiveness for sin, being a light for God, and being ready for His return, are lessons every Christian needs to review regularly. We are not saved to sit back and take it easy, nor does God expect us to try living for Him without guidance. He has provided explicit instructions for us to follow.



LIFE'S CLASSROOM

THIS
SYMBOL

→ 
reminds
you to
emphasize
the session
goals

SESSION 1

You're Invited!

MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON

Bible Text

Matthew 22:1-14

Session Key Verse

Turn to me and be saved...for I am God, and there is no other. Isaiah 45:22

Session Goals

Today each child will—

-  learn that even though God invites all people to know Him, some reject Him
-  choose to accept God's invitation of salvation

Busyness is often considered a “necessary evil” of life. Busyness, however, can be a much more serious problem than we realize. Some people will have eternal unhappiness because their busyness excluded the time and effort needed to have an intimate relationship with God. The parable of the wedding banquet reminds us of this.

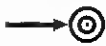
This parable reminds us of another point. One man at the banquet was without proper wedding clothes. Commentators relate him to a believer who is not fully living for God, so he is not ready for the Lord's return. The king had him thrown outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The parable is not just a warning to unbelievers who feel they have no time for God; it is also a warning to Christians. Has busyness starved your relationship with God so there is no spiritual life, only a form of godliness? Examine your busy schedule and its effect on your relationship with the Lord. Make any changes necessary to ensure that you are properly clothed when He returns.



Unit Key Verse

Let us learn together what is good. Job 34:4

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Explorer Orientation

OPENING ACTIVITY AND PRAISE

R.S.V.P.

(5 minutes)

Pass out an envelope and a piece of paper to each child. Ask the children to pretend they have been invited to a friend's birthday party and are to respond by mail to let the friend know whether they are coming. Tell them they can make an excuse (e.g. "My cousin is coming to spend the night;" "My parents are taking me to the circus;" "I am going shopping for a new pair of shoes;" etc.) or they can choose to attend. For those who have an excuse, have them either write it out or draw a picture of what they prefer to do. Those who plan to attend can so indicate by drawing a smiley face on the paper. One volunteer will act as a postman who collects the responses. The other will open the mail and respond either with a smile for an acceptance or frown for an excuse.

In today's lesson we will talk about a king who invited guests to his son's wedding, but they all had excuses.

Giving Time

(3 minutes)

Allow the children to participate in a time of giving to the Lord. You might want them to give an offering or participate individually in a special ministry.

Praise

(10 minutes)

Use the following suggested song from the Young Explorers Music CD: "Ready Or Not." Add songs of your own choosing for leading the children in a time of praise. Lead in prayer for this week's study.



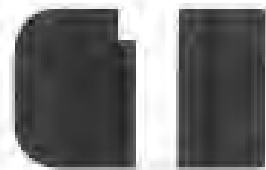
Exploring Session Goals

PRE-BIBLE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Announcements And Skit

(5 minutes)

Make announcements short and interesting. Be sure they are relevant to the children. Use a puppet or some other device for those announcements you want to be sure all the children



Items Needed

- Two volunteers
- Envelopes
- Paper

Items Needed

- Young Explorers Music CD

hear. Keep the session moving smoothly and don't lose attention by letting things drag out too long. Use the optional skit, "President's Visit," found on page 128.

Dressed For The Wedding

(5 minutes)

Label the pieces of two sets as "wedding clothes" and leave the other set unlabeled. (For children who may still be unable to read, you may use a designated symbol to identify the "wedding clothes.")

Mix the pieces and put them in a pile on the floor. Have the volunteers find the pieces of clothing labeled "wedding clothes" and put them on. Reward both children when they have completed dressing in the "proper" wedding attire.

In our lesson today we will study about a man who came to a wedding without the proper wedding clothes.

If I'm Invited To A Wedding....

(5-10 minutes)

Tell the children to pretend they have been invited to a wedding and they are to suggest some things a person would do if invited to such an occasion. Select a volunteer to come to the front and begin the game by saying, "If I am invited to a wedding, I will....(e.g. "Be happy;" "wear my hair really pretty;" "wear my best clothes;" "Tell my friends about it"; or "Behave well when I get there.") The volunteer will select another child at random to continue the process until all the children have participated. (Each participant is to choose his replacement from the children who have not yet been chosen.) If you have more than 15 children, divide them into groups of 10 or less.

Our lesson today will tell about a wedding guest who failed to realize the importance of the invitation he had received and did not wear the proper wedding clothes.



Exploring The Word

BIBLE LESSON

(10 minutes)

•Matthew 22:1-14

(Choose three volunteers from the group. Inform each child of his part and give each character his props—the king wears the crown, one or two busy people wear the dollar bill-like ties, the two servants wear the name tags. The bow ties will be used later. Instruct the children to act out what you say in the story. More servants and busy people can be used if desired.)

Items Needed

- Three four-item sets of clothing
- Two volunteers

Items Needed

- Child volunteer to begin game

1. The Parable

Jesus often compared the kingdom of heaven to other things. He did that so we could better understand what the kingdom of heaven is and what it is like. In one parable Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a king who had a wedding banquet for his son. Many people were invited to this great banquet. Just before the banquet was to begin, the king sent his servants out to tell those who had been invited (the busy people) that everything was ready.

The people refused to come! You would think people wouldn't miss the opportunity to come to a banquet given by the king. It would be an incredible event!

The king called his servants back in and said, "Tell those who were invited that the food is prepared. Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!" (verse 4).

When the king's servants went again to those who had been invited to the feast (to the busy people), the people paid no attention to them. One went off to his field to work, the other to his place of business. They were so busy with their daily plans and their money-making that they didn't care about the wedding feast even though the feast was the opportunity of a lifetime.

The rest of the people the king had invited were so irritated by the invitation that they beat and killed the servants. The king became so angry that he sent his army to destroy the murderers and burn their city.

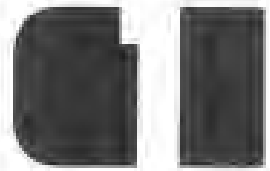
The king then said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find" (verses 8,9). The servants invited many more people. (Have the servants pull two volunteers from the audience and put a bow tie on one of them.)

Finally the wedding hall was filled with guests. As the king was talking with the guests, he saw a man who was not wearing the proper wedding clothes (the volunteer without the bow tie). "How did you get in here without wedding clothes?" (verse 12) the king asked. The man didn't know how to answer the king. The king told his servants, "Tie him up and throw him outside into the darkness" (verse 13).

2. God Offers Salvation

Whom do you think the king represents in this parable? God is like the king in this story. Just like the king kept giving the invitation to the wedding banquet, God patiently keeps offering His invitation. *What invitation does God offer?* He offers an invitation to accept Jesus as our Savior. We need a Savior because we all have sinned. When Jesus died on the cross, He made a way for sins to be forgiven.

→ ⊙ God gives people many opportunities to realize they need Him and to accept Him as Lord and Savior. Just like the people invited to the banquet, many people reject God's offer even though it is the most fantastic invitation they could ever receive. There is no other way to get to heaven.



Items Needed

- Three volunteers
- Bible
- Marker
- Tape
- Stapler
- Paper strips
- Copy Master
- 1: Story Props
 - 2 "Servant" name tags
 - 2 dollar bills
 - 3 black bow ties

3. People Are Too Busy

In the parable, many people rejected the invitation. They wouldn't go to a wonderful banquet because they were too busy. *Do you remember what the people were busy doing?* They were busy taking care of other things, such as their land and other business. Many people today are the same way. They feel their jobs, their plans, their time with friends, and their other activities are more important than knowing God and living for Him. They reject His invitation of salvation and will miss out on going to heaven.

4. Are You Ready?

Think about your own relationship with God. Have you accepted His invitation of salvation? If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, have you been too busy to spend the time with God in prayer and reading the Bible every day?

The last man mentioned in the parable thought he was ready for the banquet, but he was not. *Why wasn't he ready?* (He did not have on proper wedding clothes.) In the same way, some of us may think we are ready for heaven, but we may not be. Just because our parents are Christians or because we go to church doesn't mean we are going to heaven. Only people who truly believe in Jesus and obey Him will be ready for heaven.

Jesus ended the parable about the wedding banquet by saying, "Many are invited, but few are chosen" (verse 14). *What do you think that means?* It means God invites everyone to accept salvation. Does everyone accept His invitation? No. Some people, like the man without the wedding clothes, think they have accepted salvation by being with Christians, but they have not personally accepted Him as Savior. That's why Jesus said "few are chosen."

5. How To Get Ready

We can be a part of the few who are chosen for God's wedding banquet in heaven. We → ⊙ must accept Jesus' offer of salvation by admitting we are sinners, believing Jesus is God's Son who died on the cross for our sins, and being sorry for our sins and asking Him to forgive us. Then, as we live each day for God, we can know we are always ready for heaven.



Responding To The Word

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Prayer

(5-10 minutes)

God's offer of salvation is so important because He wants to save us from eternal punishment for sin. Explain how to receive salvation. (See page 8 for guidance.) Raise your hand

now if you have never accepted God's offer but want to do so today.

If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, think about your life. Are you like the man who came to the banquet but didn't have the proper wedding clothes? Maybe you have been too busy to live wholeheartedly for God. Maybe you've let other things keep you from spending time with God each day. You can tell God you're sorry and ask Him to forgive you.

Pray individually for those who desire salvation. Then pray for the others that God will help them use their time more wisely and obey Him so they can stay ready for heaven.

What's Missing?

(8-10 minutes)

Print the key verse on the chalkboard. Ask the children to close their eyes while you erase one word. Then let them open their eyes and choose a volunteer to name the missing word. The group will then repeat the verse and reference. Continue erasing words, having volunteers name the missing words, and saying the verse together until all of the words are erased.



Applying the Word

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

What's Really Important?

(10 minutes)

Call on a volunteer to name some of the things he does in a typical evening at home. Write his responses on the chalkboard. Then let other children add things they do that are not on the first child's list. Go back through the list and let the children tell how they would label the items by their importance. Put an "I" to the right of what the children consider important, an "S" by those items considered somewhat important, and an "N" to the right of what they consider not very important.

Looking at this list we can see that many of the things we do are only a little bit important or not very important. God wants us to be wise and use our time on what really matters. Many people accept God's offer of salvation but they are so busy doing unimportant things that they forget to spend time with God and to live for Him.

At this point, add Bible reading and prayer to the list if they're not already on it. Then have the children say which four or five items on the list would be most important to get done in an evening, keeping in mind the importance of their relationship with Jesus. Circle these items as the group names them.



Every day we can think about all the things we want to do and then decide which things are really the most important. We must make our time with God one of the

Items Needed

- Chalkboard and chalk (or an overhead transparency and marker)

Items Needed

- Chalkboard and chalk (or an overhead transparency and marker)

most important things we do. Then we can be sure we are being wise with our time, and that our relationship with Jesus is strong so we will be ready for heaven.

Team Musical Chairs

(10 minutes)

Children! How many of you know God invites everyone to come to Him for salvation? He says in Isaiah 45:22, (Have chalkboard or transparency visible.) "Turn to me and be saved...for I am God, and there is no other." Can you say it with me? The group can repeat the verse with you a couple of times. God tells us that if we will turn to Him by turning away from or stopping our sin, our sins will be forgiven. Some people get too busy in their lives to accept God's offer. Even after some people accept Christ as Savior, they get too busy to know Him as He desires them to. God wants to forgive our sins and He wants us to take time to know Him.

We're going to play a game of musical chairs. Help the children form two teams and arrange their chairs into two groupings, one for each team. During each round of the game, I will mark a seat on one chair of each team with this paper. This is a symbol used for weddings, a reminder of the wedding banquet in today's lesson. When the music stops find a chair to sit in, but you cannot sit in the chair with this symbol. The person on each team left standing when the music stops will represent someone who was too busy to accept God. Each of them will be given a chance to say the key verse before the music starts again. If they can say it, they get a point for their team. Play the game through five rounds. During each round, move the pieces of paper with the symbol to a new chair. Have an assistant run the music.

→ ⊙ After five rounds, signal a stop to the activity. Encourage the children to stop their busyness, accept God's offer of salvation, and get to know Him well.

Persistence Game

(10 minutes)

Set several jars on the floor. Give 10 pennies to each child to try to toss into the jars at a distance of 5 feet. Divide the group into several lines so that numerous children can be playing at a time. Try to allow time for everyone to participate. You may want to offer the incentive of a prize for those who succeed in tossing the most pennies into the jars.

During the game, each of you tried hard to get the pennies into the jar. No one quit the first time one of his pennies missed the jar. No one even quit when a second penny missed the jar. You kept on trying to get the pennies into the jar until all your pennies were used. The words *persistent* and *patient* can describe the way you played the game. You were persistent because you kept trying over and over. You were patient because you didn't quit even if your penny did not go into the jar.

God is also persistent and patient. He is persistent because He keeps trying over and over again to show people His love. God is also patient because He doesn't stop offering

Items Needed

- Key verse printed on a transparency or chalkboard
- Two pieces of paper with the double-ring wedding symbol on each
- Transparent tape
- Cassette player
- Children's Christian music cassette

Items Needed

- Several small-mouthed jars
- Rolls of pennies
- Small prizes are optional

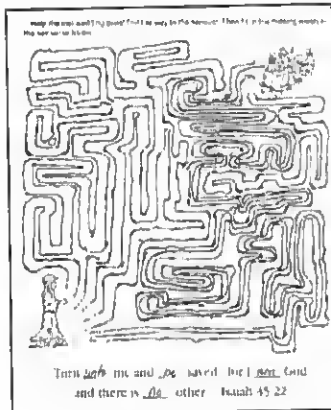
salvation to all people. Are you glad God is persistent and patient? Have you accepted His offer of salvation?

Activity Sheets

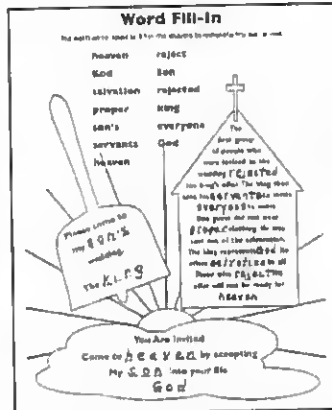
(10 minutes)

See "How to Use Young Explorers" for suggestions on how to use Activity Sheets.

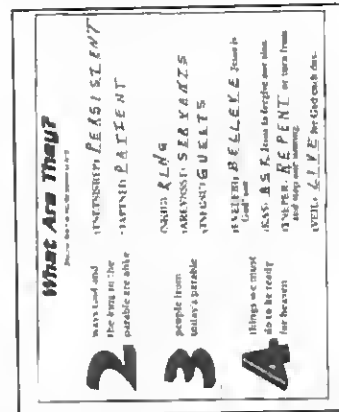
"A Lost Guest" Session 1, Sheet 1



"You Are Invited" Session 1, Sheet 2



"What Are They?" Session 1, Sheet 3



Items Needed

- Pencils, markers, crayons
- Copies of Activity Sheets 1-1 to 1-3

Larger copies of the answer sheets are provided on page 157.

SESSION 2

Gratitude Attitude

TWO DEBTORS

Bible Text

Luke 7:36-47

Session Key Verse

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! 2 Corinthians 9:15

Session Goals

Today each child will—

-  learn how a woman showed gratitude when she recognized her need for a Savior
-  thank Jesus for dying for his sins

Gratitude is a quality that most people will admit they lack. It is difficult to feel grateful when, if we honestly admit it, we feel we deserve most of the good that comes our way. Today's Bible lesson clearly brings out God's solution to an attitude of ingratitude—the realization that we deserve nothing from God in contrast to how much He has given us. Simon himself, a religious teacher with knowledge of God, failed to see he needed God's forgiveness. Because of his ungrateful attitude, Simon did not receive the forgiveness he needed. But the woman who was grateful to Jesus received forgiveness.

Help the children in your group acquire an attitude of gratitude toward God. They must recognize their sin or they will not receive from God the forgiveness they need. The Holy Spirit can reveal to them the seriousness of their sins and their need of God's forgiveness. When the children admit their need for God's forgiveness, the Holy Spirit will then be able to impress upon them an attitude of gratitude for God's "indescribable gift" of His Son.

Unit Key Verse

Let us learn together what is good. Job 34:4



Explorer Orientation

OPENING ACTIVITY AND PRAISE

Happy Birthday

(5 minutes)

Have Aunt Joan seated in one of the chairs off center of the room. Have Jeremy seated also some distance from Aunt Joan in the other chair. They will reminisce aloud separately and then come together.

AUNT JOAN (*reminiscing aloud*): Jeremy is so special. It was so hard to see him left alone when Jan and Rich died so tragically. He was so sad at first, but he has become such a wonderful young man.

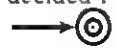
JEREMY (*thinking out loud*): Today is Aunt Joan's birthday. I want to get her something really nice. I've been saving to get a new bike, but I think I'll take the money to get Aunt Joan the beautiful watch I saw her looking at one day at the mall. She'll really like that.

(*Aunt Joan is sitting reading, then turns her head to see Jeremy enter the room with a tiny package in his hand.*)

JEREMY (*reaching out to hug Aunt Joan*): Auntie, I love you so much. Since today is your birthday, (*handing her the package*) I wanted to show you that I'm glad you gave me a home when Mom and Dad died. Uncle John told me you even gave up becoming a doctor to take care of me.

AUNT JOAN (*opening the package and looking surprised*): But where did you get enough money to buy this?

JEREMY: You knew I have been saving my money from mowing lawns to get a bike. But I decided I wanted to give you a special "I love you" gift for your birthday. Happy Birthday!



Today we will study about a woman who also gave a very expensive gift to show her gratitude for what Jesus had done for her.

Giving Time

(3 minutes)

Allow the children to participate in a time of giving to the Lord. You might want them to give an offering or participate individually in a special ministry.

Praise

(10 minutes)

Use the following suggested song from the Young Explorers Music CD: "Attitude Of Gratitude." Add songs of your own choosing for leading the children in a time of praise. Lead in prayer for this week's study.

Items Needed

- Male volunteer to play Jeremy



- Female volunteer to play Aunt Joan
- Gold watch beautifully wrapped
- Two chairs
- Book

Items Needed

- Young Explorers Music CD



Exploring Session Goals

PRE-BIBLE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Announcements And Skit

(5 minutes)

Give announcements and any guidelines you have for the children to follow during this time. Use the optional skit titled, "Thankfulness," found on page 129.

Attitude of Gratitude

(5-10 minutes)

From the construction paper, cut nine 2-inch squares. On each square, print a different letter of the word "gratitude." Mix up the squares and place them face down on a table. Ask 9 volunteers (if you do not have that many children, have each child take more than one square.) Give each child a piece of tape rolled up to stick on the back of the square (or one piece for each square). Have the children tape the squares on the board or wall to spell an attitude discussed in today's lesson.

Today we will learn about a woman who beautifully demonstrated this attitude because of what Jesus had done for her.



Exploring The Word

BIBLE LESSON

(10 minutes)

• Luke 7:36-47

Choose some children beforehand to hold onto one of the items you have brought until you cue them during the lesson presentation. At that time they are to come and stand by you at the front and hold up what they have for all to see. After a few seconds, have them return to their seats.

1. Preparing For Guests

One day, a man named Simon invited Jesus to his house. Simon was a Pharisee, which means he was a respected teacher in the church. Imagine all the things you might do if Jesus were coming over to your house!

What are some things your mother might do when you are having a special guest visit your house? (Allow responses.) Many people would clean the house well. (Call by

Items Needed

- Light-colored construction paper
- Scissors
- Felt-tip marker
- Adhesive tape
- Table

Items Needed

- Bible
- Transparency made from Overhead Master 1: Attitude Snapshots
- Housecleaning item (a can of furniture polish, etc.)
- Picture of a dessert
- Bottle of perfume

name the child with the cleaning item to come hold it up for a few seconds.) Some people also bake special foods such as a roast or a delicious dessert. (Show the dessert.) If the guest is staying overnight, the guest probably gets the nicest bedroom to sleep in. We probably don't stop to think about it, but these are things we do for the guests to show them how grateful we are for their friendship and for their visit.

(Show snapshot 1 on the Overhead Master 1.) In Jesus' time when a guest arrived at someone's home, the host would wash the guest's dusty feet. A traveler's feet became dusty from wearing sandals. Then the host would kiss the guest on the cheek as a symbol of peace. Last, for a very special guest, the host would put a small amount of oil on the guest's head as a sign of honor. It seems Simon would have gone out of his way to welcome Jesus into his home. He is the Son of God! Simon did none of these special things for Jesus.

2. A Grateful Woman

During the meal at Simon's house, a woman known by many people to be a terrible sinner, walked into the room, stood at Jesus' feet, and began to cry. (Show snapshot 2.) The meal was not just for invited guests, but someone like this woman was not welcome in Simon's house. He probably worried about what the other people would think and hoped the woman would leave.

→ ⊙ As the woman cried, her tears fell onto Jesus' dusty feet. The woman knelt down and wiped her tears and the dust off Jesus' feet with her long hair. Then she kissed His feet to show her honor for Him. (Call for the child with a bottle of perfume to come.) She then opened a very expensive bottle of perfumed oil and poured it on His feet. You probably are thinking, *Why in the world did she pour perfume on His feet?* She was honoring Jesus by anointing His feet with perfumed oil. It was her way of showing how grateful she was to Him for what He had done for her.

The woman had been a sinner who needed forgiveness just as sinners still need Him. If you have not asked Jesus into your life, you need His forgiveness too. When you admit you are a sinner, believe Jesus is God's Son who died for you, and ask Him to forgive your sin, He will. He forgives today just as He did then. Being forgiven makes us feel clean and happy inside. We feel thankful just as this woman did.

As Simon watched what the woman was doing, he thought, *Jesus is no prophet of God. If He were, He would know that this woman is a terrible sinner and would not let her near Him.*

Jesus did know the woman was a sinner. Jesus also knew what Simon was thinking just as He knows our thoughts. To explain her actions to Simon, Jesus told this parable.

3. Two Debtors

Two men owed a lot of money to a man who had loaned them money. (Show snap-

shot 3.) The first man owed 500 denari, which was as much as he could earn in a year and a half. The second man owed about 50 denari, about 2 month's worth of pay-checks. Neither man was able to pay back the money he owed, so the moneylender graciously canceled both their debts! This meant that neither man would have to pay back the money.

Then Jesus asked Simon, "Which man will love the moneylender more?" *How would you have answered Jesus? Why?* Simon replied, "I suppose the one who owed the most money." Jesus said that was the correct answer.

Simon had showed his lack of gratitude and love by not doing for Jesus what a good host would have done—washing His feet, greeting Him with a kiss, and honoring Him by putting oil on His head.

How did the woman show her love for Jesus? Why do you think the woman loved Jesus so much? The woman knew she was a terrible sinner who needed God's forgiveness. Because Jesus forgave her sin, she had an attitude of gratitude and love toward Him. Simon did not feel he was a sinner who needed forgiveness. He didn't see his need and so he wasn't grateful for what God could do for Him.

→◎ The woman and Simon were both sinners who needed God's forgiveness. God, like the moneylender, offered them forgiveness for their debt of sin. Only the woman accepted His forgiveness and responded with gratitude.

4. Check Your Attitude

Maybe you've been like Simon and never really felt you were a bad enough person to need Jesus' forgiveness. The Bible says every person is born a sinner. (Read Romans 3:23. Show snapshot 4.) Or maybe you are a person who has asked God for forgiveness, but you aren't grateful for what God has done in your life. You can be different from Simon today. Let's bow our heads now and tell God how much we love Him. We →◎ can show an attitude of love and honor for Him. (This would be a good time to help the children respond to the Word through prayer.)



Responding To The Word

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Prayer

(10 minutes)

We owe a debt we cannot pay. Jesus gave His life to pay the debt for our sins—He was beaten, whipped, and died a painful death on the cross. His offer of salvation is free to us, but it cost Jesus His life.

Walk through the plan of salvation with the group. (See page 8 for guidance.) If you realize you are a sinner and want Jesus to forgive you, come to the front. Jesus will forgive you. If you have already accepted Jesus as your Savior, give Him thanks now to show your gratitude.

Be sure to follow up with any who received salvation. Encourage them to read their Bibles and pray every day.

What A Gift!

(10 minutes)

Hold up the game and the cartridges. *Who can tell me what this is? Why is this fun to have? How would you feel if your parents or grandparents bought you not only the newest, most advanced video game, but every game cartridge you wanted?* Allow some children to express how excited they would be.

Even though some of you told me how excited you would be to get such a wonderful gift, your words probably still weren't enough to really describe your gratefulness. Sometimes it is hard to describe our feelings. That is how the apostle Paul was feeling when he wrote 2 Corinthians 9:15—"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" Paul was talking about the salvation Jesus gave to us by dying on the cross! Because of what Jesus did, we can now be forgiven of our sins and have a relationship with God. Salvation is so wonderful that Paul couldn't find the words to describe it.

→☉ We need to show God our gratefulness for His incredible gift. We are showing Him our love and appreciation for such an awesome gift when we spend time talking with Him in prayer or reading His Word. We also show gratitude by obeying God.

Take a moment to think of some short phrases that can tell our thankfulness to God. For example, "Thank You, Jesus, for dying on the cross" is one such phrase. *Can anyone think of another?* Write the first few suggestions on the gift. Allow other phrases to be shared, but explain that you won't have time to write everyone's phrase on the gift.

Hold up the gift. Try to remember every day to tell and show God your thankfulness for sending Jesus. When you do, you show gratitude for His gift of salvation to you.



Applying the Word

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

People Shuffle

(5 minutes)

(Divide the key verse as follows: Thanks be / to God / for his / indescribable / gift! / 2 Corinthians / 9:15.)

Items Needed

- Popular video game system



with game cartridges (If these items are unavailable, modify this activity slightly to fit another popular toy.)

- Large box wrapped in white paper with a colorful bow on top
- Felt-tip pens

Items Needed

- 14 pieces of construction paper with key verse portions written on them.



Items Needed

- Chalkboard and chalk

Items Needed

- Chairs
- Masking tape
- Basket
- Paper for tickets

Divide the group into two teams. Choose seven players to come forward from each team. Hand each child one card and instruct the children not to look at it until you say "Go!" After you say "Go," the children are to look at their cards and then rearrange themselves so they are in the correct order of the key verse. After a team has won the round by finishing first, reshuffle the cards and choose another seven players from each team. (If your group is small, you may want to use this activity as a non-competitive review by making only one set of cards. You may also put more words on each card if you have fewer than seven students.)

Check Your Attitude

(7-10 minutes)

Divide the children into two teams. Print on the chalkboard one blank line for each letter of the phrase, "check your attitude." Also print all the letters of the alphabet on the board, placing the vowels in a separate list.

Let the first child from the first team choose a consonant. If the letter belongs in the phrase, print it on the correct blank(s) and give his team one point for every time that letter is used. Whenever a team member guesses a correct letter, his team continues to play. If the letter is not in the phrase, erase the letter from the list and allow a member from the other team to guess a letter. Vowels can be purchased for one point.

A team may solve the phrase as long as it is their turn. Only the team that guesses the phrase correctly gets to keep its points. Continue play until the puzzle is solved or one team reaches a predetermined number of points.

(When it is a child's turn to guess a consonant, he may not consult with his team members. If a team wishes to purchase a vowel or guess the answer to the puzzle, they may consult with one another.)

All Aboard!

(5-10 minutes)

Line up chairs in your room, enough for each child in the group minus one. (For large groups, choose about 10 to 12 children.) This is the "train." Have all the children except for one volunteer sit on the chairs. The volunteer stands behind a masking-tape line on the floor away from the train. He is in the "train station." Place a basket with colored strips of paper for tickets halfway between the train and the station.

When the leader says, "All Aboard," the children on the train and the one in the station must run to the basket, take a ticket and find a chair on the train. Whoever does not get a chair must say the unit key verse, "Let us learn together what is good," (Job 34:4). If correct, he goes to the train station and continues to play. If the answer is incorrect, a chair is removed from the train, the player remains out of the game for two rounds, and another volunteer goes to the train station.

Take The Bacon

(10 minutes)

I trust each of you feel the overwhelming gratitude Paul felt when he wrote 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" Paul meant that God's gift of salvation is so awesome it cannot be described in words. Because this gift of salvation is so wonderful, we should show our gratitude to God every day. Before we start our game, let's say the verse together.

Go over the verse with the children a few times. Then explain a school yard game called "Take The Bacon." Choose 10 children to play this game and divide them into two teams. Number each group of five children one through five. The children from one team form a line facing the children from the other team. An eraser (the bacon) is set on the floor halfway between them. When you call a number one through five, the two children with the same number race toward the eraser and try to be the first to pick it up. Whoever succeeds must get back to his line without being tagged by the other person. The person who gets back to his line with the eraser without being tagged or the person who tags the other is considered the winner. The winner then has to quote the key verse from memory in order to gain a point for his team. Play to 8 points.

This game can be played with a larger or smaller group of children as long as the teams are even. Number the children off according to the number of players on each team.

Items Needed

- Bible
- Key verse printed on a transparency or chalkboard
- Chalkboard eraser



Activity Sheets

(10 minutes)

See "How to Use Young Explorers" for suggestions on how to use Activity Sheets.

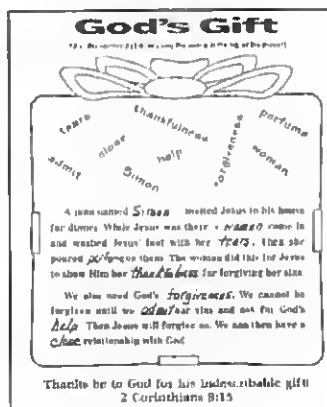
"Hidden Gifts"

Session 2, Sheet 1



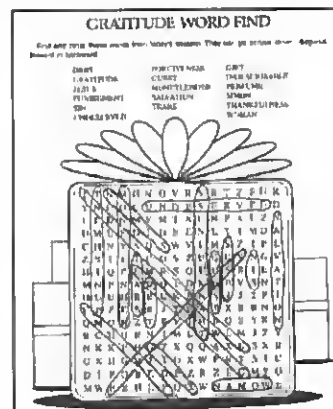
"God's Gifts"

Session 2, Sheet 2



"Gratitude Word Find"

Session 2, Sheet 3



Larger copies of the answer sheets are provided on page 157.

Items Needed

- Pencils, markers, crayons
- Copies of Activity Sheets 2:1 to 2:3

SESSION 3

It's Not Fair!

WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Bible Text

Matthew 20:1-16

Session Key Verse

Be content with what you have. Hebrews 13:5

Session Goals

Today each child will—

-  learn God rewards those who work for Him
-  determine not to complain if he doesn't have what others have



How much of our lives are spent comparing ourselves to other people? We compare our possessions, our abilities, and our appearance to what others have. We determine our “needs” based upon what others possess.

Although comparing oneself to others is a common practice for most of us, we probably agree that it is a bad practice. Comparing can cause low self-esteem, envy, strife, and even pride. God desires that we take our eyes off of others and instead fix our eyes upon Him.

We must realize that when we complain about what we have or who we are, we are actually complaining against God. Sometimes we may even think we “deserve” certain things. We do not deserve any good thing. God, in His great love and mercy, has lavished on us so many wonderful blessings. He has promised to supply all of our needs and to give us the desires of our hearts. When we fully grasp His provision, how can we dare to complain or compare.

Challenge yourself to live a life of contentment before the children in your group. Help them to realize the richness of life in Christ!

Unit Key Verse

Let us learn together what is good. Job 34:4



Explorer Orientation

OPENING ACTIVITY AND PRAISE

Green With Envy

(5 minutes)

Today we are talking about how we are to feel when good things happen to others. This water (hold up the yellow water) represents a friend who has just found out his family is getting a new puppy. He is very excited and happy.

This water (show blue water) represents how you feel when he tells you about the new puppy. You've always wanted a puppy, but your parents say you can't have one. So when you hear your friend's news, you feel sad. You wish you could have a puppy.

What color will I get when I mix these two jars of water together? Allow guesses. Let's find out. Pour the water into the third empty jar. *What color do I have now?* (Green.) Green is the color we associate with envy. Envy is the same thing as jealousy. If a person is jealous of the good things that happen to others, we say he is "green with envy." If we are content with what we have and are happy for others when good things happen to →◎ them, we won't become "green with envy." Today we're going to talk about some people in the Bible who let envy get in their way.

Giving Time

(3 minutes)

Allow the children to participate in a time of giving to the Lord. You might want them to give an offering or participate individually in a special ministry.

Praise

(10 minutes)

Use the following suggested song from the Young Explorers Music CD: "Let My Life Be A Light." Add songs of your own choosing. Lead in prayer for this week's study.



Exploring Session Goals

PRE-BIBLE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Announcements And Skit

(5 minutes)

Give announcements and any guidelines you have for the children to follow during this time. Use the optional skit titled, "That's Not Fair!" found on page 129.

Items Needed

- Three clear quart jars half full of water
- Yellow and blue food coloring (Prior to the session add enough food coloring to make the water in one jar yellow and the other blue.)



Items Needed

- Young Explorers Music CD

Open-Ended Situations

(5-7 minutes)

Read the situations listed below one at a time. For each one, ask the group to respond to these two questions:

1. *How would you be tempted to feel or react?*
2. *How must you, as a Christian, feel and react?*

Guide the discussion. The children may be honest in admitting how they would be tempted to feel and react. But they can also determine to be glad for others and to be thankful for what they have.

1. You were part of a relay team in gym class. When your team won, several people congratulated your team members, but no one congratulated you.
2. You did not get the part you wanted in the school play. Your best friend did.
3. A fellow student and her family won a trip to a popular theme park. You would love to go there, but your family can't afford to go.
4. Your brother got more money on his birthday from your aunt than you did on yours.
5. Your cousin got to spend the summer at your grandparents' ranch. You couldn't go because your parents needed you to help baby-sit your little sister for the summer.



Exploring The Word

BIBLE LESSON

(10 minutes)

•Matthew 20:1-16

1. The Parable Of The Vineyard

In Session 1 we learned that Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a banquet prepared by a king. This is so we can better understand what the kingdom of heaven is and what it is like. In this session, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a landowner and his workers.

A landowner went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. A vineyard is a place where grapes grow on vines. The landowner told the men he would pay them a denarius, the usual day's pay. They agreed and went to work for him at 6 o'clock in the morning. (Draw two stick figures above 6 a.m.)

About the third hour, or 9 o'clock in the morning, the landowner saw more men standing in the marketplace with nothing to do. He hired them, and they went to work in his vineyard. (Draw two stick figures above 9 a.m.)

Items Needed

- Bible
- Transparency made from Overhead Master 2: Vineyard Worker Times
- Three different colors of transparency pens
- Overhead projector

The landowner went out again at noon and 3 o'clock in the afternoon and hired more workers. (Draw two stick figures above 12 p.m. and 3 p.m.)

Finally, at 5 o'clock in the evening, the landowner went out and found more men standing in the marketplace. "Why have you been standing here doing nothing all day?" he asked. "No one has hired us," they answered. So the landowner hired them and sent them to his vineyard to pick grapes. (Draw two stick figures above 5 p.m.)

→ ⊙ At the end of the workday, around 6 o'clock in the evening, the landowner had all the workers brought together to be paid. (Draw one stick figure above 6 p.m. using a different color of pen. Draw a simple hat on his head to distinguish him as the landowner.)

The workers who were hired at 5 o'clock in the afternoon got a denarius each. (Under 5 p.m. draw a circle and draw a S inside to represent a denarius.) All the other workers got a denarius also, even the first group who started at 6 o'clock in the morning. (Draw a sample denarius under each group of workers, going from the group at 3 p.m. and ending with the group at 6 a.m.)

2. Workers Complain

The first group of workers noticed how much the other workers had gotten paid. They thought they should have gotten more money since they had worked more hours. They complained, "You paid these men the same as you paid us when they only worked 1 hour and we worked 12 hours! We did most of the work and you paid them the same amount as we got" (verse 12).

You may sometimes feel things are not fair just as the workers did. But in one way we are all equal: God loves everyone so much He sent His only Son to die for our sins. Anyone who asks, receives complete forgiveness. God does not want anyone to miss heaven. Everyone who accepts Jesus as Savior receives eternal life just as each worker received the pay the landowner promised.

The landowner said, "I'm not being unfair. You agreed to work for a denarius. If I want to give the same amount to the last people I hired, don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Are you jealous because I am so generous?"

3. God Rewards His Servants

It doesn't seem fair that the first workers got paid the same as the last workers. The last workers didn't deserve a denarius. But the landowner was fair because he paid all the workers what he had promised them.

Sometimes we may feel as the first workers did that God is being unfair. The Bible does not say God will give us all the same things—the same clothes, abilities, friends, personality, or appearance. God is fair. He does give each of us everything He has promised in His Word. God will reward us for serving Him to the best of our ability.



Like the landowner, God is also generous. Even though we don't deserve it, He → ⊙ gives us many good things because of His love for us. We are to be content with what He gives us. We don't want to become like the first workers and be jealous of the good things God gives to others. Instead, let's be glad we serve such a generous God.



Responding To The Word

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Prayer

(10 minutes)

Being content isn't always easy. But God can help you learn to be content. Instead of thinking about the things you don't have, think about the good things God has given you. God has said He will reward those who serve Him. He has also promised to meet all our needs.

The best thing God has given us is salvation. Anyone who admits he is a sinner, believes Jesus is God's Son who died for our sin, confesses his sin, and asks forgiveness will receive salvation. It doesn't matter who he is. God loves everyone. Pray individually with each child who desires to accept Jesus as Savior. (See page 8 for guidance.) Then pray for the group.

Thank You, God, that You have given us so many good things we don't deserve. Help us to be content and to overcome the habit of comparing ourselves to others.

Who Has The Bone?

(10 minutes)

We have been talking about being content with the good things God gives us. I thought of a verse that tells an important attitude we each are to have. (Show the verse.) "Be content with what you have," Hebrews 13:5.

What does it mean to be content? If we are content, we will be satisfied and happy with what we already have, instead of feeling we need what someone else may have. If we are content, we won't be whining and complaining that we don't have the things other people have. Our contentment pleases God.

As we think about this verse, we're going to play a version of "Doggie, Doggie, Who's Got Your Bone?" (Divide the group into two teams.) I will pick one person from each team to come up front and turn his back to the group. On the floor behind each person picked, I will put a dog bone. Show the bones to the group. While the two people up front have their backs turned and eyes closed, and everyone in the room is very quiet, I will point to one person from each team to come up, take the bone from

Items Needed

- Bible
- Key verse printed on a transparency or chalkboard
- Two rawhide dog bones

behind his team member, quietly return to his seat, and hold the bone behind him. Everyone else also is to sit with his hands behind him as if he were holding the bone.

Then I'll tell the two people up front to open their eyes, turn around, and guess who has the bone. They each get three guesses. If they guess correctly, the person with the bone must bring it up to his teammate. The teammate (doggie) must say the key verse from memory. Each team gets five points if the person with the bone is guessed and five points if the verse is said correctly. If either of the players does not guess who has the bone within three guesses, his team gets no points. Choose two new "doggies" for further rounds as time allows.



Applying the Word

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

Good Things Pop-Up

(10 minutes)

God's Word tells us about many wonderful things He gives to His children. If you have accepted Jesus into your heart and are living for Him, these wonderful things are for you also. We don't deserve any of these good things, but God gives them to us because He loves us so much. When we remember all these good things, it is easier to not complain when we see others get good things too.

Make sure all the children have Bibles. We are going to play Good Things Pop-Up. I will give a Scripture reference and the first person to find it will stand and read the verse to the group. Once you read a verse, you must wait two turns to give others a chance to read. For practice find the verses anyway.

Some verses you can use are listed below. After reading each verse, repeat what God gives us so it is clear to the whole group. (1) Psalm 103:10 (mercy—not treating us as our sins deserve); (2) Romans 5:8 (He loved us while we were still sinners.); (3) John 3:16 (He gave His Son); (4) Acts 1:8 (power); (5) Philippians 4:13 (strength); (6) 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 (gifts of the Spirit); (7) 1 Peter 1:8 (inexpressible joy); (8) John 14:27 (peace); (9) John 14:26 (Counselor); and (10) Psalm 33:18 (unfailing love).

Sing It!

(5 minutes)

Teach the children to sing today's key verse to the tune of "Mary Had A Little Lamb."
Be content with what you have,
what you have,



Items Needed

- Bibles (one for each child)
- List of verses that tell about good things God gives to His children.

what you have.

Be content with what you have,

Hebrews 13:5.

Then sing the verse while adding a motion such as doing jumping jacks, clapping on the words, standing on one foot, turning in a circle, patting their heads, etc.

Comparison Quiz

(10 minutes)

What does it mean when you compare yourself to others? Allow some children to respond. Give a few examples of comparisons. Sometimes when you compare you are putting yourself down. For example, you might say, "Allison sure is pretty. I wish I was that pretty." At other times, you are being prideful. You might say, "Look at John. What a klutz! I could really beat him at a game of one-on-one basketball." You are really saying you are better than John.

We're going to do a fun activity to make you aware of how much you compare yourself to others. Put your hands on your lap with your fingers flat. Then I'm going to ask five questions. If you have ever done or thought the thing I mention, bend one finger under. (It might be helpful to give one sample question and then demonstrate how a child will respond if he agrees.)

1. *Have you ever wished you were as pretty or as handsome as someone else?*

2. *Have you ever felt badly because you know that no matter how hard you try you will never be as smart as someone you know?*

3. *Have you ever thought, My house is so much nicer than so-and-so's house?*

4. *Have you felt embarrassed that your clothes aren't as "cool" as someone else's?*

5. *Have you ever thought, My art project is much nicer than so-and-so's?*

How many of you bent down at least three fingers? Look around. All of us (or most of us) struggle with comparing ourselves to others. We do it so often that we don't usually realize we are doing it. *Do you think comparing is good or bad? Why?*

Comparing is bad because it can make us jealous of what other people have or it can make us think we are better than other people. Sometimes we may even complain if we don't have the good things other people have. God wants us to be content. Being content means being thankful for who you are and what you have, but not

→ ⊙ being proud about those things. We must stop comparing ourselves to others and learn to be content with what God has given us.

Mock Awards

(5 minutes)

Pick four volunteers. (Since it is a privilege to help up front, make sure you choose children who have been well-behaved.) **I want all of you to pretend these four children are**

Items Needed

- Bite-size candy bar, regular candy bar, king-size candy bar, bag of candy bars, and enough candy bars of the same size for each child

SESSION 4

Do Your Homework

THE SOWER

Bible Text

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23; Mark 4:2-8,13-20; Luke 8:5-8,11-15

Session Key Verse

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

Session Goals

Today each child will—

-  learn the importance of hearing and obeying God's Word
-  list things he knows the Bible commands, which he will obey

Perseverance and following through seem to be personal qualities that have fallen by the wayside during the last few decades. In our society of instant gratification and the “fast-food generation,” no one wants to wait or work for anything. We want easy jobs, quick food, and fun, fun, fun.

Unfortunately, this attitude has carried over into many people's spiritual lives. They want a relationship with God without any effort or work on their part. But God's Word makes it clear that the Christian life is not that easy. We must take up our cross daily and follow Him.

Today's session is a challenge to each of us to allow God's Word to produce a crop in our lives. It is only when we persevere that we can bear fruit for His kingdom.

Encourage your group to value the quality of perseverance. Help them realize they can be fruitful in God's kingdom, even while still a child, if they will hear and obey God's Word and persevere in following Him.

Unit Key Verse

Let us learn together what is good. Job 34:4



Explorer Orientation

OPENING ACTIVITY AND PRAISE

Garbage In Garbage Out

(5 minutes)

Jessica and Andrea are standing talking toward one side of the center of the room. Two chairs sit in front of the computer opposite them.

Andrea: I am so excited! Dad got us a new computer and I get to use it.

Jessica: Wow! I wish I had one.

Andrea: Dad says it will help our whole family, we just have to take turns with it.

Jessica: Do you think I could work on it sometime?

Andrea: Sure, Mom is showing me how to use it. Yesterday she helped me make some birthday cards for my cousins. We saved them on computer disks and we can print them out.

Jessica: Would it be okay if I see them?

Andrea (*heading toward the computer with Jessica following*): Sure!

The girls seat themselves in front of the computer and Andrea picks up a computer disk from off the table. She inserts the disk into the computer and waits for the image to come up on the screen.

Jessica: It's not working!

Andrea: Oh no! The disk is blank! We lost all those beautiful cards we made!

Jessica: I wonder what happened?

Andrea (*removing the computer disk and looking at it with a sigh*): We used a disk that was not formatted properly and the information didn't copy.

This computer disk is somewhat like the bad soil we will learn about in today's lesson. Just as the information did not copy onto the improperly prepared disk, seeds planted in bad soil will not grow into fruitful plants.

Giving Time

(3 minutes)

Allow the children to participate in a time of giving to the Lord. You might want them to give an offering or participate individually in a special ministry.

Praise

(10 minutes)

Use the following suggested song from the Young Explorers Music CD: "Be A Light." Add songs of your own choosing for leading the children in a time of praise. Lead in prayer for this week's study.

Items Needed

- Computer or box decorated to look like a computer
- Computer disk
- Table for computer
- Two chairs
- Two volunteers to play Jessica and Andrea



Items Needed

- Young Explorers Music CD



Exploring Session Goals

PRE-BIBLE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Announcements And Skit

(5 minutes)

Give announcements and any guidelines you have for the children to follow during this time. Use the optional skit titled, "You Get What You Plant," found on page 130.

Imposter

(7-10 minutes)

Bible commands: Forgive others; love God with all your heart; attend God's house; love everyone; etc. Imposter commands: Do not laugh in church, attend church every day; do not pray with your eyes open; sleep in and rest on Sunday; cleanliness is next to godliness; a stitch in time saves nine; a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; etc.

To be faithful to obey God's Word, we need to know what it says. That's why it is so important to read our Bibles every day and attend church as often as we can. Then we will keep learning about God and how to please Him.

Print the word "Imposter" on the chalkboard. Let several children share their ideas of what an imposter is. Something or someone that is an imposter appears to be something it is not. Hold up the imitation jewelry. For example, the diamond in this jewelry is an imposter. It looks like a real diamond—it is clear, white, and sparkles—but it is not a real diamond. It is an imposter.

People in this world sometimes tell us imposter ideas from the Bible. They might say the Bible says something it really does not. Sometimes people may say these untrue things because they just don't know their Bibles very well. We need to know our Bibles well so we won't be fooled by false commands.

Print the heading "Bible" on one half of the chalkboard and the heading "Imposter" on the other half. Choose volunteers to come and draw a slip from the bag. Let each read his slip aloud to the group. (Assist the younger readers.) Let the group decide if the command is a command from the Bible, or an Imposter—a rule or command not really in the Bible. After the group decides, allow the volunteer to tape the slip under the appropriate heading on the chalkboard. Continue until all the slips have been drawn and categorized.

Items Needed

- Paper grocery sacks
- Slips of paper—some with Bible commands printed on them and some with "imposter" commands
- Tape

- Chalk and chalkboard
- Piece of imitation jewelry with a "diamond" in it



Exploring The Word

BIBLE LESSON

(10 minutes)

•Matthew 13:1-9,18-23; Mark 4:2-10,13-20; Luke 8:5-8,11-15

(Prior to the session, use seven medium-sized pieces of poster board for making visuals to use in the Bible lesson. On a transparency you will need to draw the sun, a bird, and a thorny plant. Use an overhead projector to project the three pictures onto separate pieces of poster board and trace them with a thick marker. On the remaining four pieces of poster board print Path, Rocky Soil, Thorny Soil, and Good Soil.)

Before the session, pull aside seven children and ask if they would like to help you with the Bible lesson. If so, assign them a part (Bird, Sun, Thorn, Path, Rocky Soil, Thorny Soil, and Good Soil) and give them an idea of their role.

When you are ready to begin the lesson, have your seven actors come forward and give each his visual. Instruct them to keep their visuals turned around until it is time for their parts. When it is time for each participant, he is to hold up his visual for the group to see. Have those representing the four types of soil stand up front with you in a row in the order of the story. The three "problems" should stand off to the side with an adult helper who can help cue them.

1. The Parable Of The Sower

Jesus told a story one day about a farmer who planted some seed. Farmers back then didn't have big machines to plant the seeds; they had to do it by hand. As the farmer was throwing out the seed (act out "sowing" seed), it landed on many different kinds of soil, or dirt.

(Stand next to the child who is the Path. Cue him to show his visual.) **Some seed fell on a hard, dry dirt path that people walked on next to the field. The birds flew down and ate the seed on the path before it could take root and grow.** (Birds are now to enter and lead Path off to the side.)

(Stand next to Rocky Soil. Cue him to show visual.) **Other seed fell on rocky soil, where there was not much dirt because of all the stones in it. The plants grew a little bit, but their roots couldn't grow very deep because of the rocks. When the sun came out, the plants withered from the heat and they died.** (Sun enters to lead Rocky Soil off to side.)

(Stand next to Thorny Soil and cue him to show his visual.) **Some of the farmer's seed landed among thorns. The seeds sprouted and started to grow, but the thorns grew faster than the plants and crowded them out.** (Thorn enters to lead Thorny Soil off to the side.)

Items Needed

- Bible
- Seven poster board pictures or signs
- Seven volunteers
- Transparency sheet
- Overhead projector



(Stand next to Good Soil and have him show his visual.) **Some of the farmer's seed landed on good soil. This seed sprouted and grew and produced a big crop.**

(The actors may be seated after turning in their visuals.)

2. The Seed And Soil

Jesus' disciples came and asked Him what the parable, or story, meant. *Before I tell how Jesus explained the parable, who knows what the seed stands for in the parable?* (God's Word) *What does the soil stand for?* (various types of people) *Who is the farmer?* (God)

3. The Path

The hard, dry soil of the path is like the people who hear God's Word, but do not accept it. Even though they hear about God, they choose not to believe in Him. Then Satan (like the birds in the parable) comes and steals the Word out of their hearts. They forget it.

4. Rocky Soil

The rocky soil is like the people who hear God's Word and accept it, but don't spend time developing their relationship with God. So even though they have accepted Jesus as their Savior, they have not taken the time to grow roots in their relationship with God through praying and reading the Bible. *What happened to the plants in the rocky soil in the parable?* (The sun came out and they withered and died.) When these people encounter difficult problems or are persecuted for serving Jesus, they get discouraged and quit living for and obeying God. If we want to go to heaven, we must spend time getting to know God.

5. Thorny Soil

The thorny soil is like a person who accepts God but lets his life get so full of other things that he has no time for God. He uses all his time doing schoolwork, chores, talking with friends, or having fun. Nothing is wrong with those things, but anything that keeps us from praying, reading our Bible, and living for God has too much of our time. Soon God is crowded out of our lives altogether. We must be careful not to let anything crowd out our time for God.

6. Good Soil

The seed that fell on good soil is like a person who hears God's Word and obeys it. *What are some ways we can be like the good soil?* (prayer; reading the Bible; obeying the Bible; and listening to pastors, other church leaders, and Christian parents) **We must try to know God better every day just as we try to know our good friends. Then we can**

serve Him faithfully. When we hear God's Word from our teachers, our pastor, our → ☉ parents, or even in songs, we must listen so we can know how to please God. We can be like the good soil if we'll listen to God's Word and obey it.



Responding To The Word

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Prayer

(10 minutes)

Which kind of soil are you? If you have never asked Jesus to come into your life, you can be like the good soil and do that today. (See page 8 for guidance.)

Jesus, we want to be like the good soil. We want to hear and obey Your Word for the rest of our lives. Please help us to persevere when we have problems. Sometimes things can make us sad or scared. Help us be strong. Thank You for loving us and promising us the crown of life if we are faithful to You.

Crowns Of Life

(10 minutes)

Prior to the session, cut six crowns from colored paper. Make them a simple 4- by 8-inch rectangle with four or five points on the top. Across each crown, print one of the following: Your dad loses his job; someone made fun of you when you told him about Jesus; you are failing math; your school teacher says the Bible is just a storybook; your mom and dad are getting a divorce; your grandma died even though you had prayed for God to heal her.

I hope each of you has been challenged today to listen to and obey God's Word for the rest of your lives. It won't always be easy; in fact, sometimes it will be very difficult. But if you are faithful to God, He will reward you. Our key verse today tells us, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). *Can you say it with me?* Have the group recite the verse with you while pointing to the words on the transparency or chalkboard. In this verse God tells us to be faithful until when? (the point of death) If we are faithful to obey God all our lives, He will reward us with the crown of life—we will live in heaven with Him forever. Have the group say the verse with you a few more times. Then remove the verse.

Choose six volunteers. I am giving each of these volunteers a paper crown with a problem or a temptation on it. These are examples of things that could happen in our lives and, if we allow them to, could stop the growth of God's Word in our hearts. But if we keep living for God in these situations, we will receive from Him the crown of life. Give a crown to each volunteer, one at a time. Have him read the situation to the group.

Items Needed

- Bible key verse on transparency



or chalkboard

- Six paper crowns with a trial or temptation printed on each

(You will need to assist the beginning readers.) After each volunteer reads his situation, have the group say the key verse together.

Encourage the children to always be faithful to obey God!



Applying the Word

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

Items Needed

- Chalkboard
- Chalk

Simon Says

(7-10 minutes)

Play "Simon Says" for a few minutes. Set a time limit that will end the game without everyone's being eliminated. When time is up, print on the chalkboard the three categories of players: those who got out at the beginning, those who got out during the rest of the game, and those who were still standing at the end.

People's responses to God's Word are similar to these categories from "Simon Says." During the game, some children got out right away. They heard my voice, but they weren't paying attention or didn't understand what they heard so they didn't obey. Some people are like this first group with God's Word. They hear the Word of God, but they don't listen carefully and obey it.

The second group of players did what I said for a while, but not for the whole game. Some people are like that with spiritual things. They obey God's Word for a time, but then they turn away from God because of bad things that happen in their lives or because they give in to temptations that come. They stop trying to obey or please God.

→ ⊙ The third group listened and obeyed my words the entire time. They persevered and worked hard to stay in the game. That's like people who listen to and obey God's Word their entire lives. They don't stop obeying God when they're tempted to do wrong or when bad things happen in their lives. They persevere, or follow through, on their decision to live for God.

Maybe you have accepted God into your life, but you feel like sleeping in on Sundays or doing and saying the things others at school do. Don't give in to temptation! Make up your mind today to obey God—then obey Him! Heaven will be your reward.

Serving God No Matter What

(5 minutes)

During the Bible lesson we learned that people might quit living for God. *Can you recall some reasons they might stop?* (Problems, persecution for serving Jesus, or too busy

with other activities.) One example might be if someone's parents were getting a divorce. This person might choose to be mad at God and blame God for his parents' divorce. He might stop attending church and praying and reading His Bible. *What should he do instead in this situation to keep living for God?* (Allow several children to respond.) Let's keep living for God no matter what situations we face.

Activity Sheets

(10 minutes)

See "How to Use Young Explorers" for suggestions on how to use Activity Sheets.

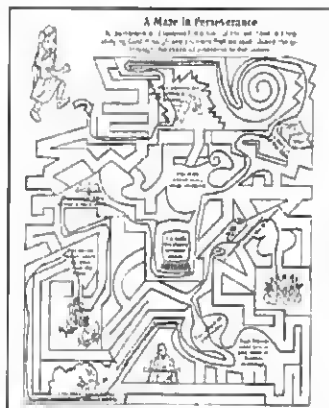
"Growing Plant"

Session 4, Sheet 1



"A Maze in Perseverance"

Session 4, Sheet 2



"Perseverance Situations"

Session 4, Sheet 3



Larger copies of the answer sheets are provided on page 158.

Items Needed

- Pencils, markers, crayons
- Copies of Activity Sheets 4-1 to 4-3